# Rethinking the Power of Aid

## The Crisis of Humanitarian Action

medico international Report 25
english supplement

10386

Die vorliegende Textsammlung ist eine Beilage zur Dokumentation der Konferenz von medico internatonal, Institut für Erziehungswissenschaften Universität Frankfurt / Main und Heinrich Böll Stiftung »Macht und Ohnmacht der Hilfe«, 28. und 29. März 2003 in Frankfurt am Main.

Die Dokumentation ist auf Deutsch erschienen, diese Beilage umfasst die wichtigsten Beiträge im englischen Original oder in englischer Übersetzung.

The present collection of speeches and texts is a supplement to the conference documentation »Rethinking the Power of Aid«, held by medico international, Institute of Pedagogics Frankfurt University and the Heinrich Boell Foundation on March, 28th and 29th 2003 in Frankfurt/Main.

The documentation was published in German, the present enclosure covers the most important contributions, either in their original version (in English) or translated into English.

**medico international e.V.**
Obermainanlage 7
60314 Frankfurt/Main
Tel. (069) 94 43 80
Fax (069) 43 60 02
Email: info@medico.de
www.medico.de
Spendenkonto 1800
Frankfurter Sparkasse
BLZ 500 502 01

# Content


The Saving Idea is yet to be Conceived
*Thomas Gebauer* ..... 4

The Crisis of Humanitarianism
*David Rieff* ..... 12

Our Problems – Their Gains!
*Nuruddin Farah* ..... 20

About Loneliness and Radicalism
*Dr. Ruchama Marton* ..... 25

Focusing on Unconditional Humanity
*Ulrike von Pilar (Médecins sans Frontières, Germany)* ..... 29

Aid between Humanitarian Services and Social Intervention
*Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel* ..... 32

Rethinking the Power of Aid
*Programm* ..... 36

*Thomas Gebauer (Executive Director of medico international, Germany)*

# The Saving Idea is yet to be Conceived

## Notions towards a New Definition of Humanitarian Aid

Relief organizations tend to muster support for their work on huge billboards: »A thousand questions, one answer: Aid«. This is a wonderful, a magnificent promise in a world which threatens to drown in violence and misery. A promise that is refreshingly self-confident as it claims to have the solution for so many uncertainties. It is therefore no surprise that, in the English-speaking world, people do no longer speak of humanitarian engagement when talking about aid, but use the term »humanitarianism«.

History tells us that humans have always helped each other in times of need. Today it seems, however, as if feeling a moral concern for fellow human beings has turned into a veritable philosophy. A philosophy that is omnipresent in the current public debate like no other and that has developed its own very specific practices. For, these days, almost everybody cares for human rights and aid for the poor: politicians, celebrities, industry, trades associations, the media – and, yes, even the military like to lend themselves an aura of charity contending that their future interventions will be humanitarian rather than military. It is certainly true that providing practical help to people in need is highly acknowledged in the public. And, nearly every day, we can see how successful such aid is. See the glamorous charity galas on TV, the brochures of the aid organizations, the images of white 4x4s and aid workers not shirking away from any risk to be right on the scene of terror in order to help the victims.

The world – a global village of those in need of help and their helpers? »Humanitarianism« as the last hope for salvation? – The unique success story written around »humanitarianism« over the last decades has been in for some criticism lately. Some commentators, like US-writer David Rieff are talking about a crisis of »humanitarianism«. »Relief«, as he concludes, »is a saving idea that in the end cannot save but can only alleviate.«

One thing, however, is for sure: the precarious state of the world, calls for relief everywhere. There can be no doubt that, without the humanitarian assistance provided by relief organizations over the last decades, thousands, or maybe hundreds of thousands of people more would have died in wars or from starvation.

It is also true, however, that the number of wars and the gulf between rich and poor has been growing over all these years. The miserable state of the world has long since arrived at the suburbs of the wealthy northern hemisphere. There is no reason to disparage first aid, individual asylum or food aid – they are small improvements frequently helping indi-

vidual people to survive. Nevertheless, we should not ignore the fact that even the most successful humanitarian aid has not been capable of containing the disastrous development let alone having provided a solution. Violence and poverty are the result of the powers that prevail; they do not reflect a lack of humanitarian assistance but the failure of government policies whose aim it should have been to create conditions fit for human beings.

## Disaster

Only a few decades ago, Jean-Paul Sartre concluded that there was no such thing as natural disasters, because ultimately all disasters were man-induced. Since then, the consequences of human action have kept backlashing on us with brute force. Pollution, animal epidemics, mass migration, displacement or wars come unannounced, sneak up from behind and seem numb to all attempts at remedying them.

We cannot even say there is a lack of knowledge of what is going on in the world. Nobody would seriously claim that it makes sense to destroy the environment, uproot people or wage war. It is strange, however, how the awareness of impending dangers goes hand in hand with a growing feeling of despair. Is it possible at all to prevent the misery? Has it not become inevitable for a long time, just like a natural disaster? Outrage and sympathy are mingled with feelings of fear and shame. There are signs of a disaster which, like in the times of our ancestors, is perceived as omnipotent and coming from without, and which renders us so helpless that we cannot help but mythologize it.

In a seemingly paradox way, narrowing our perception to individual, particularly blatant cases of disaster appears to help us to cope with an otherwise unbearable reality. Focusing on a spectacular earthquake, a dramatic flood, the war against what we take to be the powers of evil, we lose our awareness for »commonplace« emergencies and terror faced by humans allover the world every day. In fact, dramatizing individual, seemingly inevitable horrors seems to liberate us from feeling ashamed for the fact that, in view of the level of development achieved in the world, we could easily prevent displacement, diseases and starvation for millions of people.

## Victims

At the same time, we have whole libraries providing information on who the victims are. What is the significance of these victims? Do they even have some kind of social role to play?

In the mid-80s, the press officer of the International Monetary Fund explained that it was not only an inevitable fact but the intention that there would be losers and that, in order to continue to reap the benefits of the prevailing economic order, it would have to be rid of all the shackles according to the credo of neo-liberalism. He added that consistent liberalization of the market forces was the only way to ensure wealth and well-being and that

this would be taking its toll of victims. The interventions following this announcement were monstrous. One third of the world's population was socially uprooted and excluded from the formal exchange on world markets; there was even talk about a »redundant« population. And even those who were the alleged winners had to make huge concessions: nowadays humans are controlled and assessed right down to their biological substrate, the social dimension has been completely dissolved or is being measured by mere economic standards.

Suffering such losses calls for denial or at least for compensation. What seems to help us in this context is to regularly recall those who are even worse off, that is to say those who fell victim to our efforts to secure our own privileges. Giving aid to the disadvantaged can be compared to a carnival situation where prevailing conditions are reinforced by a periodical reversal of all norms that is limited in time and strictly controlled. There is indeed a trend in the wealthy part of this world to link empathy and charity with selected situations in order to legitimize and declare as normal their absence in everyday life. Moral impulses triggered at the sight of human plight are safely channeled into sporadic fund-raising events. Justice is transformed into the good deed consoling us for the lack of justice as the prevailing norm. »Let us do something good for a change«, confessed Helmut Kohl sticking a note in a collection box when he attended the first Africa Day in the mid-80s.

## Aid

Aid in the emphatic sense does no longer seem to be an issue these days. People still seem to pay lip service to the concept of providing helpful assistance with the aim of overcoming poverty and powerlessness in order to create and restore autonomy, but this idea has lost all its practical relevance. Fading hopes for emancipation, the disillusionment with the failure of rigid revolutionary approaches have had a detrimental effect on the idea of social development. The good maxim of »give a man a fish; you have fed him for today; teach a man to fish, and you have fed him for a lifetime« – which used to be very popular until recently, seems strangely behind-the-times, almost obsolete.

For wanting to challenge the status quo is no longer deemed a credible undertaking by the public. The modern heroes of the civil society movement do not indulge in political deliberations, they just knuckle down on it. In the past it was the concept of a different world that motivated people to act; now it is mere apolitical pragmatism, non-interference, impartiality, just making sure the greatest hardship is relieved without, however, questioning the powers that be.

This approach to aid has long since established its own iconography. The white helicopter pilot rescuing a newborn African child from an almost inundated tree is emblematic of »humanitarianism« and epitomizes the kind of »interventionist« aid floating in from the outside (and very likely to disappear

soon, too), which is stripped of any context or social relevance. It is restricted to rescuing individuals, while the catastrophic world order, which would be in heavy need of rescue, seems as if it was cast in concrete and unchangeable.

Incidentally, the increasing importance of private relief organizations does not necessarily reflect the fact that democracy is on the rise, rather the opposite. As those in need can no longer resort to legal rights usually granted by a state government, because their social welfare now depends on the philanthropic »goodwill« of charity organizations or on the efforts of multinational corporations to polish their images, we may rightly use the expression of »re-feudalization« to describe the development we are witnessing.

## Depolitization

While the approach to aid was being stripped of its political components, pragmatism defeated idealistic visions, and mere acceptance of a given situation triumphed over hopes for emancipation.

In fact, determining the political root causes or the historic circumstances leading up to a plight almost always comes off worst. Suddenly, those asking for the reasons of the famine at the sight of a starving child are reproached for being inhuman. Reducing war and crises to their humanitarian consequences, however, has considerable implications. Those who are incapable of developing an understanding of a crisis, because they are ignoring the relevant political and cultural conditions, cannot respond to such crisis in an appropriate way.

During the Kosovo crisis, for example, it was the massive presence of foreign aid structures that totally ostracized the remaining part of the local civil society that had escaped Milosevic's expulsion policy. Independent intellectuals, human rights activists and health experts turned into drivers, translators and workers in the employ of the relief organizations. »That's OK, the important thing is that we have provided aid« – said a German politician, for whom it was apparently no problem that aid, originally meant for alleviating the hardship of real human beings, turned into an end in itself.

Indeed it does not seem an obstacle for the members of relief organizations to know very little about the people they are dealing with. Their aid projects obey technical and economic criteria and do not even pretend that the victims of war and poverty are more to them than objects that they provide with supplies with the greatest possible efficiency. Most relief workers do not consider wars political or historic events but rather humanitarian crises requiring relief. And even if it sounds bitter: if Auschwitz were to occur today, the mass media and appeals of relief organizations would be likely to merely call it a »huge humanitarian crisis«.

## Capitalization

Such pragmatism easily associates with business interests. The many billions

of US-Dollars raised for humanitarian activities in the world have made »humanitarianism« an interesting industry recently expanding at high growth rates. The market even has its own trade fairs, where foodstuff, lifeboats, mine detectors, tents, body bags, gas masks, water purifying plants and other aid products and services are on display.

The extent to which aid has been successful is measured less and less by social criteria. Econometrics seem much more important, like the number of people reached, the volume of supplies dispatched, the efficiency of aid logistics, the speed in which an organization gets to the scene of the emergency. It is the operative capacity that counts, not the human relationship to the victims. The Humanitarian Aid Office of the European Union (ECHO) says that solidarity with those who suffer is no evidence for the quality of humanitarian aid but rather an obstacle.

Gradually, aid has been removed from its previous social context and transformed into a »product« which, just like any other product, does not necessarily correspond to the needs of the recipients any longer. Donor interests are pushing their way to the focus of attention or, what is worse, the act of providing aid increasingly depends on the extent to which it can be exploited by the media. Governmental donors, but also the relief organizations themselves, insist on their rigid target figures and »controlling« that is supposed to improve the aid's »output«, although social action is neither predictable nor does it obey a business logic. Instead of dealing with the nature and inherent dynamics of aid and its effects, the capitalization of aid offers the possibility to make those aid programs fail which are unwanted for political reasons by simply stamping them with a negative economic assessments. No profit, no aid. But how can you economically assess an approach to aid that is not only aimed at providing relief to refugees but also at ensuring they can return some day? And is it possible to develop at the drawing board, without involving those affected, something like a »result-driven« plan for the process of rebuilding an organic social community in which victims of violence and poverty feel secure again?

There is a risk that degrading aid to a mere »product« is only the beginning of a far-reaching structural change of aid. Within the EU the demand was voiced to withdraw tax advantages from charitable institutions, in order to avoid competitive distortion and to allow private companies access to humanitarian aid markets.

Many companies, among others the German private TV station RTL, have founded their own relief organizations, in order to secure their share of the aid business. They can be seen as the harbingers of a self-referential »humanitarian industrial complex« threatening to evolve in the future. The medium places the topic on the agenda, mobilizes support and raises funds, translates all this into projects supplying the images which ensure a convincing media-based »controlling«.

## Instrumentalization

Stripping aid of its social context exposes it to the control of central authorities and instrumentalization in many ways. The depolitization of aid has exacerbated the humanitarian paradox. The more smoothly uncritical aid works, the better can it be instrumentalized for political and military purposes.

Indeed, aid has turned into an economic and political resource much sought-after by the parties to a conflict. Be it taxes on goods imported as aid, or extorting, robbing or plundering the population fed from outside – there are many ways for parties to a war to get there share of the billions of Dollars worth of aid provided to the victims annually. In countries like Angola, Liberia or Afghanistan, humanitarian aid has taken on such an importance that it has to be considered an integral part of the vicious circle of violence.

Aid is also the perfect means to overcome a lack of political legitimation. Warlords or political elites who can hardly legitimize their authority by proper governmental structures, obtain allegiance by combining tyranny with a minimum of social welfare for their people, this welfare being ensured by foreign aid. Public acceptance of military measures increases when relief organizations – like in the Kosovo war – draw the attention of the public to a refugee emergency by staging large-scale campaigns.

These dilemmas cannot be resolved by applying the axiom that aid is to be restricted to the relationship between the victims and those providing aid. The impartiality emphasized quite rightly by the relief organizations must not result in indifference in the face of political reality. It is part of this reality, for instance, that new players appear on the scene who are utterly unscrupulous about misusing aid for their own purposes. Force Protection is the name NATO uses for humanitarian aid programs that military forces carry out simultaneously with military operations in order to raise their public acceptance.

In the course of economic globalization, the old East-West axis of conflict has shifted and now runs North-South, between a rich global north and a global south drowning in poverty. The peace strategies practiced in international crisis management efforts resemble those of the 18th and 19th century. Like in Victorian times in England this is about a repressive kind of poverty relief where there are good victims and bad victims. The »good victims« who deserve every support for their good political behavior – as happened in Yugoslavia only recently – receive so-called »conditioned aid«, while so many »uncomfortable victims« are dragging out a miserable existence in refugee camps, sometimes over generations, or are exploited and disciplined in export zones, which are the workhouses of modern times.

Striving for social justice has been denigrated into an early warning sign, an indicator of system disruptions which need to be contained in order to maintain the existing gulf between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless, the

privileged and the humiliated. Apparently the end justifies every means: the first strike, state-authorized torture, the abolition of democratic legal principles, the continued development of long-since banned chemical weapons, and the misuse of humanitarian aid.

Within the evolving »global civil war order«, aid is bound to fall hostage to a security policy whose only objective is to perpetuate the status quo. This is why humanitarian aid's terms of reference are likely to change completely over the coming years. There are more and more signs suggesting that humanitarian aid may become part of a complex set of policies aimed at bringing about peace and acting like a »foreign social welfare office« to the outside while striving for legitimation at home. In this case, private relief organizations will run the risk of turning into mere service providers to government institutions.

## Prospects

True, many attempts are made to defend humanitarian activity against its instrumentalization in the ongoing process of destruction. Some observers, like Rupert Neudeck, demand that aid be purely self-referential. In his view, those providing aid are like modern Sisyphuses who are incapable of bringing about a change, but cannot help but help time and again. This is how those providing aid move to the foreground rather than the intended effect of aid. »Love thy neighbor and act accordingly« is cherished as a moral attitude upheld by each individual. Striving for justice as an ethical principle of society is relegated to the sidelines. Ultimately, the aesthetic exaltation of the aid heroes perpetuates the disaster.

It is high time relief organizations became aware of the dilemmas of their activities. They will certainly have to rewrite a number of myths, one of them being that humanitarian aid serves the victims while the helpers stay impartial. Those who want to help others cannot actually be neutral, but must interfere, taking a stand for the victims and against the perpetrators. Any other course of action would be highly immoral. Those who help others to overcome an emergency and enable them to take action themselves, leave marks that will remain far beyond the moment in which the actual aid was provided.

How powerful such aid is can be observed wherever relief organizations do not restrict their work to short-term interventionist »missions«, but rather try to provide an aid that is tailored to the needs of the partner and the context. Humanitarian crises cannot be eliminated by implementing purely humanitarian solutions. Whoever wants to help must fight for democracy and social development – standing by the victims of poverty and tyranny.

## Conclusion

I owe the idea of comparing aid to poetry to the Palestinian writer Mahmoud Darwish. My intention is not to aestheticize aid, but rather to illustrate its political contents.

Aid can never be an ally of war and violence. Just like poetry, aid, in its substance and nature, serves peace and the defense of freedom and solidarity. It springs from mutual empathy and social ethics. Although aid cannot be a party faithful to political reality, it will never be neutral. There is no neutrality between war and peace, between oppression and freedom, unfairness and justice.

However, aid has come under tremendous pressure allover the world lately. When societies persist in the status quo and frustrate any renewal, which is the ultimate goal of aid, aid will turn into an island of solidarity and empathy inundated by increasing irrationality, or it becomes part of what will eventually be renewed: the security machinery installed to protect the status quo.

*Translation: Julia M. Böhm*

Thomas Gebauer, Nuruddin Farah, Ingrid Spiller and Ruchama Marton

*David Rieff (Journalist, USA)*

# The Crisis of Humanitarianism

## Not only the CNN-Effect is bringing Humanitarian Aid into Crisis

I would like to not only talk about Iraq. You may think that that is a bit of special pleading on the part of an American, but really it is a special pleading on the part of someone who spent about ten years of his life in Africa and is worried that the emphasis on Iraq, even for the best of political motives, is from a strictly humanitarian point of view, something of a mistake. Let me be much blunter: a great mistake.

Because one of the many perversities of the humanitarian system, and it is a system, it may not be a business, as some of its critics, I think, rather unjustly say, but it is certainly a system. One of the perversities of it is that crises are picked more on the basis of some nexus of popular concern in the West, western political interest and what we call for a lack of a better word the »CNN-effect«, that is 'what is on Television', than for the actual content of the crisis.

As Ulrike von Pilar tried to point out last night, the most interesting thing about the humanitarian situation in Iraq at this moment is that we don't know anything about it. We have no idea, if this is one of the major humanitarian catastrophes of this period in human history in this early part of the 21st century, or whether in humanitarian terms it is actually a comparatively minor event. We simply don't know.

There are a hand full of aid workers who are actually free to move about in Iraq, even to the extent they're free to move about, it is by no means clear what communications they have with each other and therefore what kind of confidence assessments can be made, either of needs or of the potential for harm. So we are blind, to a very large extend blind.

This is obviously not the first time this has happened. Cosovo was a perfect example for this. During the bombing part of the Cosovo war, what was remarkable, and I am a someone who covered the Cosovo war as a journalist and was sitting for most of it on the Albanian-Cosovo border, what was interesting was that we didn't really know what was going on in Cosovo. We knew what was going on in the refugee camps, we knew something about the mass deportations, we also knew something, despite the ways in which both NATO and the Serbs tried to lie about it, about the course of the war, but we did not know, really, what the humanitarian emergency was. And it's the same thing in Iraq.

Whereas we do know that in Angola there is famine. We do know about the AIDS epidemic, not just in Sub-Saharan Africa, but I would remind you in the Caribbean, they are my own country, and now in Eastern Europe, in the former

Soviet Union very close to this country. We know about that. And I think the first thing, if we want to think lucidly and not sentimentally about what we are confronting is to start actually being modest about what we know and trying to separate things out.

One thing that struck me about the discussion yesterday was the degree to which humanitarian issues in their own terms were barely addressed. In other words, we talked a lot about the rights and wrongs of the Iraq war. And as an American I am perfectly going to take the heat from you on this issue. I don't think that it is only as an American, that makes me say, that you in the audience may consider, that the Iraq war is one of the worst political events to happen in the last period, but it is by no means clear, that it is one of the worst humanitarian events.

The Iraqi government for example is claiming 500 dead. That is not on the standards of the horror of the world. I'm sorry about this malign calculus. I apologize for engaging it. But I think it's important because resources are limited.

One other thing that struck me very forcefully last night is that I didn't hear any discussion about money. And yet, money is inseparable from the pursuit of humanitarian action. Humanitarian agencies without money are just people who issue press releases. It's as simple as that. There is no humanitarian action without proper funding. There is political symbolism, there may be political activity, but there is no emergency relief. You cannot break a cholera epidemic, set up a feeding center, let alone, systematic programs of relief in conflict areas, unless you're properly funded. And yet last night we talked as if the money either wasn't a problem or wasn't even an issue, when it's in fact the principal issue.

Let's talk about Iraq. The British Government, which has actually one of the largest contingency funds within its humanitarian structures for humanitarian action, a fund of app. 100Mio pounds, that about 150mio Euro, has now pledged 70Mio of it to Iraq. Now that means, there is 30Mio Pounds left in the fund for all other humanitarian emergencies anywhere in the world, unless the British government pushes through in parliament a supplemental appropriation, which given the nature of politics is probably months away. It doesn't seem very likely, knowing what I know of the way that works (I used to live in Britain), that parliament is likely simply to appropriate in general funds more money for overseas development. So what you are looking at, for example, is in this Iraq-crisis, and I tried to say in my preceding remarks, that it is not clear this is the worst humanitarian crisis around. The humanitarian funding sources are being drained away, like water going down the sewer.

Maybe again, I can see, maybe the humanitarian crisis in Iraq will be as severe, as people say it is. It is certainly the job of humanitarian agencies to be alarmists and I am not one of those critics of aid who criticises agencies for making statements that a lot of people will die and then people don't die, it's their job

to be alarmists, it is correct that they are alarmists. It is much better to be alarmists and then be pleasantly surprised by the fact that one's anticipations have not taken place than it is to be calm about things. The humanitarian workers relief are absolutely right to behave, to work in that register.

But having said that, simply the distortion of what Iraq is going to bring is amazing, impossible. If I may go back for a moment, to take only one agency: when the Cosovo crisis broke out, the world food programme took one official from every one of its programmes in Africa and seconded them to Cosovo. In other words, every single programme in Africa lost a single person. Given the famines in Africa, and I remind you there was no famine in Cosovo, this was a catastrophic blow to African Programmes.

There was some young people standing outside yesterday who belong to the German Attac, who were handing out leaflets saying »in the middle of Iraq, don't forget about Africa«. I think Nuruddin Farah's remarks yesterday are absolutely correct. I don't want to single out Africa, there are other places not to forget about in terms of emergency relief. When I speak about relief work, I am talking about emergency relief, relief in times of war and natural disaster. I am not talking about development aid. I am very admiring of what relief workers do in emergencies.

I am probably almost as sceptical as Nuruddin Farah about what development has done which in my idea is less than nothing.

So I consider first of all the fusion of development and emergency a huge mistake. If think the moral hazards of development which again Nurudin Farrah explained great and subtle and correct, are such that one must be at best extremely sceptical and I think one is legitimately allowed to be more than sceptical. Whereas I consider humanitarian aid for all its weaknesses, all its paradoxes, all its dilemmas to be an unmitigated good thing. Now, that may sound strange to you from someone who is supposed to be a fierce critic of aid.

But from my point of view emergency relief is one of the few activities in this world about which one can be quite unambiguously proud. Having said that, that doesn't mean, that it shouldn't be criticized, viewed sceptically, or that its own fantasies about itself shouldn't be questioned. And may I go even further: its own hubris. Again I want to raise a point, that was raised in a question last night, which is the issue of competence. We heard a great deal yesterday about how humanitarian aid needed to be a vehicle for peace. The first sentence of the conference document, at least in the English translation, reads: »Aid can never be an ally of war and violence. Helping each other requires empathy and enables us to overcome poverty and dependency.«

But I believe almost every word in that is false. Let me be very blunt. Why can aid never be an ally of war and violence? Again in its practice. In its ideal fine, it's perfectly fine to say, »we aid workers or we who give money to aid the world, we

want to put an end to war and violence. We see humanitarian assistance as part of a larger peace process, a larger questing towards justice. A larger part of the good people versus the people who want to continue the neo-imperial order, or whatever political vision of the world suits your fancy.« That may be true. But may I submit that's about us not about the people who get the aid. That's about what may make a person in Oxford or Frankfurt or Lyon or Madrid give money to an aid agency. That is not what aid does.

Again, what is the competence, if what you get from an aid worker is food; I submit to you that the issue is not the motives of the person giving you food, but the amount of food and efficacy of the delivery or that food that counts for you. Again in this discussion it's all about intention, it's not about competences. My friend Rony Brauman, who is one of the leading figures in »Doctors Without Borders«, France has always said, emergency relief groups do not have a monopoly on giving relief. Relief is something that was given long before aid agencies ever came into being and I submit to you that may be given long after aid agencies have be so transformed that in their present form they are no longer recognisable to us.

An army can give food. Armies have always given food. On the domestic level you know this perfectly well. Do you say it's outside the competence of the German Army to cope with the floods here recently? Of course you don't. You don't say, »the floods can't be coped with by the Bundeswehr, the floods have to be coped with by the GTZ«, because you're not thinking in this highly moralized discourse. You are actually thinking about how to do something about the floods. You don't say, the GTZ or the German Red Cross has a monopoly on dealing with this floods, a moral monopoly and the Bundeswehr can never do it because it as a military arm is by definition an ally of war and violence, that after all is what armies are in their essence, however much Europeans may fantasize otherwise (the American shows the sting in his tail).

The fact of the matter is aid comes in all shapes and forms. That is the historical truth. It comes for example historically in the shape of Christian missionary charity, a form that is anything but dead today in the poor world. If you know the American and now worldwide organisation »World Vision«, which has given aid quite effectively in many contexts, it is also a prospertising organisation. And indeed, its former operations head is now the head of the US agency for international development, which after ECHO is the largest single funder of aid. It comes in the form of the Red Cross. No one in his or her right mind would say that the Red Cross is an ally of war and violence. On the other hand every one I have ever worked with in the Red Cross has said to me: »We work in the context of war«. The Red Cross takes the existence, the purenity, the permanence of war for granted, as a great Red Cross official said in Rwanda: »Our aim is to bring a measure of humanity, always

insufficient, into situations that should not exist.« That's another vision of aid. And in many ways the ICRC, the international committee of the Red Cross remains the most coherent of all aid movements.

There is the tradition in my own country, which in its secular version tends to be quite narrowly governmental. American aid agencies have a long tradition dating back actually to the period of the Russian revolution, where the United States mounted a very large and complicated aid effort in Siberia in 1919 and 1920. At the same time that it intervened militarily – shades of the present.

In my own country the tradition of aid is one that ties relief groups to government. It is true, that there is a European tradition, dating back probably to Doctors without Borders, to Médicins sans Frontières, at the time of the Biafra war and after, that has a notion of independent autonomous aid. And also aid that does come closer to what is written in this conference document about aid never being the ally of war and violence. If you will it's aid as a social movement as well as a deliverer of goods and services, an alleviating machine.

That tradition is one of the traditions of aid. But it is just a verbal slate of hand to pretend, that it's the only tradition, or frankly, even the dominant tradition. The fact is, that the relations between governments and aid agencies are very intense, very close and not only in the United States.

You may like your government, you may think »George Bush fuck you«, as it says in half of the windows I pass in Berlin where I'm living at the moment. And you may think »now that he has revealed himself to be a true antibalacist, Gerhard Schröder is a prince of a man.« You are certainly entitled to that view. But don't let the fact that you may like your government and hate mine confuse you about the degree to which aid agencies and governments are in a state of really intense cooperation and linkage. Nor should you think, that the militarisation of aid is simply a phenomenon of the United States.

I remind you, that in the European Rapid Response Force that went into a fact in 2003, the mission of that force was peace enforcement and humanitarian assistance. In other words, you latest attempt at having a military collective security explicitly links military action with humanitarian assistance. So again the idea that somehow aid is sitting out there on its moral high horse refusing steadfastly to be an ally of war and violence while the wicked Donald Rumsfeld subjugates Iraq. I'm afraid it is rather a fantastic vision of reality.

Let me again try and make it even more complicated. What is the core competence of aid? What do aid workers know about. Is an aid worker the person you want to go to for political analysis? Should Oxfam, or MSF, or dare I say medico.de be the people to whom one applies for wisdom about the proper outcome of conflicts.

I heard yesterday someone say that the war must stop on humanitarian grounds. That tells me nothing. Perhaps this is an

unjust war. I in fact am opposed it, but a bit more modestly than most of the people in this room I think, and probably by the standards of most people in this room my opposition would constitute little more than a sort of quibbling. Having said that, think about it for a moment. Let's say the Iraq war is as most of you think of it, a barbarous, colonialist injustice. Is that why the humanitarian criterion should be invoked? What about a just war? Do you think, that the war in Rwanda should have been stopped? Do you for example think that instead of allowing the Tutsi army to take back Kigali we should have intervened and stopped it in place? Do you think WWII should have been stopped on humanitarian grounds?

In other words, it is in the nature of the humanitarian position to want to stop all wars. It tells us nothing about their justice. What it tells us is that war is, always has been, and always will be about the slaughter of innocents. That's what war is. It's other things, too, unless you're a pacifist. If you're a pacifist war is only about the slaughter of innocents. But if you are not a pacifist, war can also be just, it can also be necessary; you can make various arguments. But war is about the slaughter of innocents. That's what war is. So if you're working from your humanitarian perspective, all wars should be stopped on humanitarian grounds.

The reasons to oppose the war in Iraq surely are political and moral. Because to oppose them on humanitarian grounds, again, unless you are a pacifist, is simply to say that war involves hideous humanitarian consequences. If you are not a pacifist, the issue of whether you think that humanitarian issue should take priority depends entirely on the justice of the war. There is nothing new about this idea. But to say simply it's fine, oppose the war, say »the Americans want to re-colonise the Middle East«, say »no blood for oil«, but don't say that it's because of the humanitarian imperative. Because on that basis you must oppose all wars.

This brings me back to the level of competency – core competence. It is right for humanitarians to talk from a humanitarian perspective. There is nothing wrong with that. You don't want medico or MSF, or Oxfam to say: »Well our perspective is this, but looking at it from the point of view of, I don't know, Minister Fischer, we have another point of view.« That would be silly. Of course humanitarians have to argue the humanitarian case. That is right and proper. What is not right and proper, I think, is to accept the premise, that humanitarians are necessarily the only or the best source of wisdom about politics or war, anymore than you should accept that journalists are. We are in the field, too. Are we the best source? I doubt it.

The question is core competency. Why should a water and sanitation engineer, and here I come back again to Nuruddin Farah's very astute remarks about how people in the poor world often view aid workers, perhaps he was a bit sweeping in his account of aid workers. I think there are plenty of aid workers

who don't conform to this kind of bourgeois Europe and North America exploiting the poor world. But there are certainly more than enough examples of such people to make what he says entirely appropriate and well and apt in the context of such a conference – again necessary.

But why should I take the political views of an American water and sanitation engineer who arrived in Burundi three weeks ago. Seriously – why? It isn't graven in stone, that Oxfam is the source of funds and ergo of wisdom about the crisis, in which, I remind you, it delivers services. It helps out, it alleviates, that's what aid does. Aid is this marvellous thing. It's an extraordinary thing.

My idea is, that despite all the talk about the Global Village, the media, the internet, and all the rest, we are in fact as human beings not very good at sympathizing with people we don't know. I think actually that's quite difficult. So I think the success of the humanitarian movement in precisely getting people to sympathise with people they don't know and going out and trying, however inaptly, to do something, is a remarkable if you like to use the famous phrase of Walter Benjamin's 'document of civilisation'. But if I may quote the Benjamin-aphorism in full, he did after all say »every document of civilisation is also a document of barbarism«. And it's that dilemma, that you need to think about. It's the question of whether an alleviating idea, noble as it absolutely is, can become, as it were, the moral center for thinking about the world. And whether aid workers should appropriately make, what I consider extraordinarily hubristic claims, that »aid can never be the ally of war an violence«, when every historical anecdote we know suggested that they have been, they are and they will continue to be.

Is there a possibility of an independent aid? Absolutely! I think there are groups that really are holding out for an independent vision of humanitarian relief. One that might incarnate the kinds of ideals that are contained in the conference statement and in Thomas Gebauer's speech yesterday. I particularly think of the MSF movement, which I think has come as close to exemplifying that view as any group of humanitarian relief workers. Having said that, again, they have been very successful at fundraising, they have private sources, which has made them less dependent on government. It is by no means clear, that that kind of fundraising can be done by many groups. It may very well be that a few groups will succeed in doing this and most will not. In any case the MSF movement is at least at the moment part of the humanitarian system which contains all kinds of other groups, that don't take this road.

Again, yes, there is an independent world of relief, that thinks about the independent 'humanitarian space', to use the term of art, but it is by no means clear, that it's dominant. And it's certainly by no means clear that you can clean up the kind of moral posture of humanitarian assistance by pushing it through the UN.

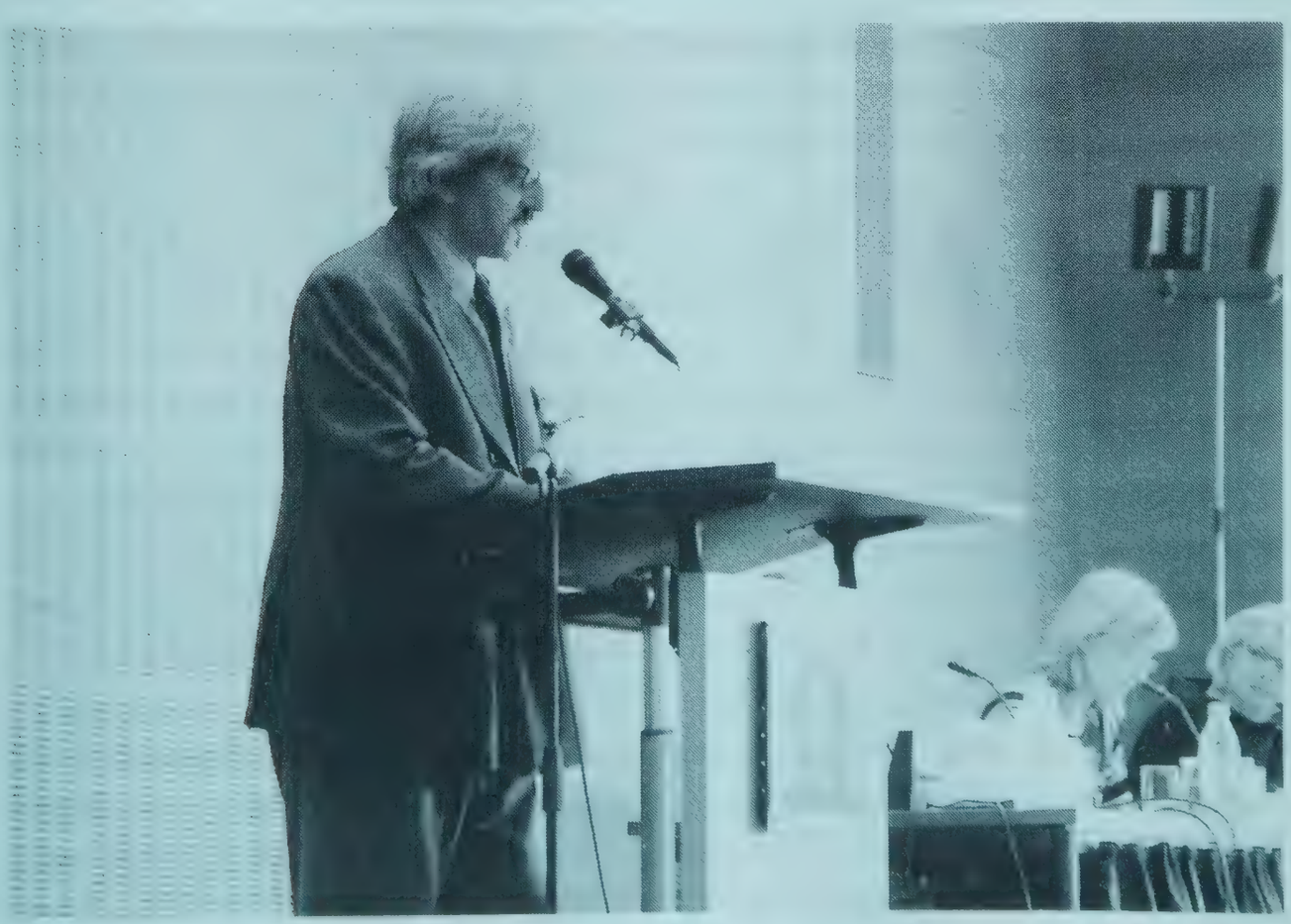
I am very struck, I think Thomas Gebauer talked about this last night, by the degree to which the debate at the moment is whether the United States will run Iraq unilaterally or the UN will, i.e. the UN- Security Council, i.e. the five victorious powers of WWII, who have been granted for reasons no one can now explain control over the political actions of the world, legitimating control.

I don't agree with much the Iraqi government says, but I must say I thought the Iraqi embassador to the UN's remarks in the open media on the Iraq crisis where he said: »Why are we talking about humanitarianism when we should be talking about the justice of the war?«, was absolutely correct. And indeed unassailable as a position. It seemed to me he had it exactly right.

And I actually think, people in Europe are being misinformed, in some sense distracted by the debate about the UN, when the real debate should be elsewhere. The recent debate about the UN is fundamentally humanitarian. It's fundamentally a way of saying: »We're not going to talk about politics, we do talk about humanitarian aid and we are going to talk about our good intentions.«

I know this is a post-christian conference, but as a citizen of a christian country let me just close by saying: »The road to hell is paved with good intentions.«

*Translation: Esther Kleefeldt*



David Rieff

*Nuruddin Farah (Writer, Somalia/South Africa)*

# Our Problems – Their Gains!

## Considerations about Colonialism and Aid

I have a vague memory of a conversation I had recently with a Nigerian academic visiting Cape Town. We were in limb time, because we were at the wake of a mutual friend who had just died. I was there that evening with a specific assignment: to formalise the proceedings of the funerary arrangements at the chapel at which I had been asked to officiate. Everyone was busy with one thing or another, and there were a great deal of comings and goings, with friends and acquaintances joining us and then drifting away after listening to our arguments or making their contributions. Of all the things that were done or said, however, I remember only a couple of phrases that have remained sharp at the edges in the way words spoken in a delirium are.

I recall going away, getting into my car and driving home, all the while mulling over the phrases »Our Problems, Their Gains!« I have no idea why the phrases struck a cord with me, or why I kept reciting them to myself as though they were a mantra whenever I revisited the evening's exchange in my memory. Nor can I identify where they came from, or who uttered them. It may have been the Nigerian academic who had used them; it could equally have been one of the other interlocutors who spoke them in connection with our recurrent debate about the vexed relationship between Europe, the USA and Africa. As it happens, we, in Africa, worry our vexed rapport with the developed world in the same way the weak worry the troubled relationship they have with the strong, who impose their will on them without ever bothering to pay them a moment of their attention.

Which perhaps explains why, when later in the same week I sat at my desk to write my talk, soon after accepting to participate at this symposium, the phrases kept badgering me time and time again and without a letup, until I agreed to use them.

### Our Problems, Their Gains, indeed!

Africa's history is a shop-soiled one in the sense that as goods go, our people are a damaged people on account of the continent's centuries old contact with the impure thoughts and unclean hands of the colonialists. By virtue of having been reduced to a fall continent, every failing is blamed on us. We've been turned into a metaphor, the place where everything has allegedly gone wrong, according to a perverse logic in which everyone is helplessly poor, where millions are dying of AIDS or related ailments, where communities are warring »over nothing.« Africa is where the do-gooders go, not so much

to do good as to feel good, following the balancing of their guilt accounts; it's also where do-badders go in pursuit of their own self-serving ends, or those of their governments. Africa is the sewer into which the donor countries' unemployables are conveniently drained, and where mediocre persons can acquire »expatriate expert« status and therefore earn far beyond their reach in their countries. A Somali proverb has it that a hundred cures are on offer whenever one person is sick. That Africa is ailing is an undeniable fact. Many of us are concerned with the ever-present question as to what has brought about this stymied state of affairs. Some of us trace Africa's failings to the »black shadows of disease and starvation« – as Joseph Conrad puts it- these being the consequences of the imperialist's genocidal policies that depopulated whole areas of Africa, and sequestered her future.

Considering the time constraints, I will give a very brief outline of why we are where we are and how we got there. At the risk of sounding simplistic I will divide our vexed relationship with Europe into four main timelines: before the arrival of the colonialists, when the continent was not much different from several other continents when we too ate what we grew and didn't feel beholden to external influences; during the colonial era, when, turned into chattels, we were enslaved, sold and transported across oceans, and when Africa became depopulated, with millions of its able-bodied men and women taken away. The third stage coincides with the decade following our flag independence, when we made great strides in every sphere, especially education and in the creation of viable infrastructures. It was our aim to catch up with the other continents, given that the imperialist's indifference to our well being. (Compare the number of schools and students in the Somali peninsula during the colonial era to those who've gone to schools in the first twenty years after flag independence, and you will comprehend my meaning. To my mind, anyone who argues that Africa is doing worse nowadays that it did during the colonial era is playing hide and seek with the truth!) And lastly the present, when Africa is, admittedly, in dire doldrums, and when we find ourselves at the lowest rung of the world's development ladder. Who is to blame?

I suppose that one of our major failing was that we didn't pay heed to the age old wisdom that who puts all his eggs in one basket had better stand guard over it day and night, if only to kept track of where it is, what is happening to it, and what is going into and out of it too. Rather than watch over our basket, we turned our attention elsewhere, purposefully getting down to the serious business of making up on lost time and lost opportunities. In less than two decades, we increased the school enrolments in our countries five hundredfold, built more infrastructures to enhance the number and quality of our institutions, and developed more of our technological capacities than the colonialists did in two hundred years.

Another failing was that we assumed we had got shot of the colonialists. But

LIBRARY

no, our dependence on them took a pathological turn. It was as though we couldn't live without them -more like a woman who says she has a brute for a husband, but who won't leave him, because she is hooked on brutality. In fact, no sooner had the selfsame colonialists quit our territories than they returned, as our technical advisors on fat cheques, supplemented with hardship allowances, charged with the task of working on our five-year-plans of development. A few more of them arrived later as part of a package under the rubric »bilateral agreement,« a byword for doctored falsehoods. And when the purchasing power of our local currencies weakened still further, and we couldn't even pay the salaries of our civil servants, and couldn't run our universities fruitfully, and when the teachers of our schools had no chalk and our pupils no exercise books -and we know how this came about, and can name the institutions that are responsible for the diminution of our buying capacities through rigging our economic potential- another term with a twist in the tail became a la mode: foreign aid, state-managed by men and women who operate in the grey area between compassion for those in need and condescension to the same. As a species, the men and women in the aid business are –my apology to Susan Sontag, from whom I'll borrow the phrase- tourists in other peoples' tragic realities. They fly in looking like boys and girls just out of grade school, and move about showily in 4x4s, talking down to everyone and throwing their weight around. Mere tourists, they are unfamiliar with the ways of the peoples, and are downright offensive to other cultures.

## But what is my gripe?

My main gripe is with my people: who are short on commitment, but rich in the rhetoric of the mendicant, and whose response to our problems has been zilch. Nor have we displayed a minimum of self-regard, or made the slightest attempts to solve some of these problems in as honourable, as truthful and as scientific a way as possible. Please do not misunderstand me. I am not displeased in my people or dismissive of them, because they have relied on the sweat and produce of other peoples' labour, but because they've continued to abide by other folks' frames of references. What's more, they have handed our problems that are of our making over to other economists, other scientists and other thinkers with their own agendas or their governments. At the very least, we should have had a shot at them ourselves in the dubious hope of becoming beneficiaries of whatever knowledge or experience one might gain from tacking them. If the problems are ours – which no one doubts they are- why should working the solutions out fall to others, unless there is something in it for them, which they say there are not. To-date, our contribution to the exercise has been limited to us providing the paparazzi with our shock troops in the form of starving millions, many of them children and women, the former with flies feeding on their kwashiorkor,

the latter heavily pregnant and unable to move or breastfeeding and skeletal too, and to then making appeals to the international community. Our problems, Their Solutions!

Before resting my case, let me sidestep the question of foreign aid so as to frame it in a way that takes account of the destructive nature of the rapport between the developed world and ours. In a poem titled »Modern Traveller« and published in 1898, the English poet Hilaire Belloc boastfully says,

*»Whatever happens we have got*
*The Maxim Gun, and they have not!«*

One is tempted to exclaim, »What arrogance?« or »So what?« and, leaving it at that, walk away from the entire scene. However, one would do well to pause, heed and then retort that Belloc's arrogance is in part due to the fact that we buy these guns and use them on one another until we raise the famines and the resultant starvation, and thus perpetuate our underdevelopment.

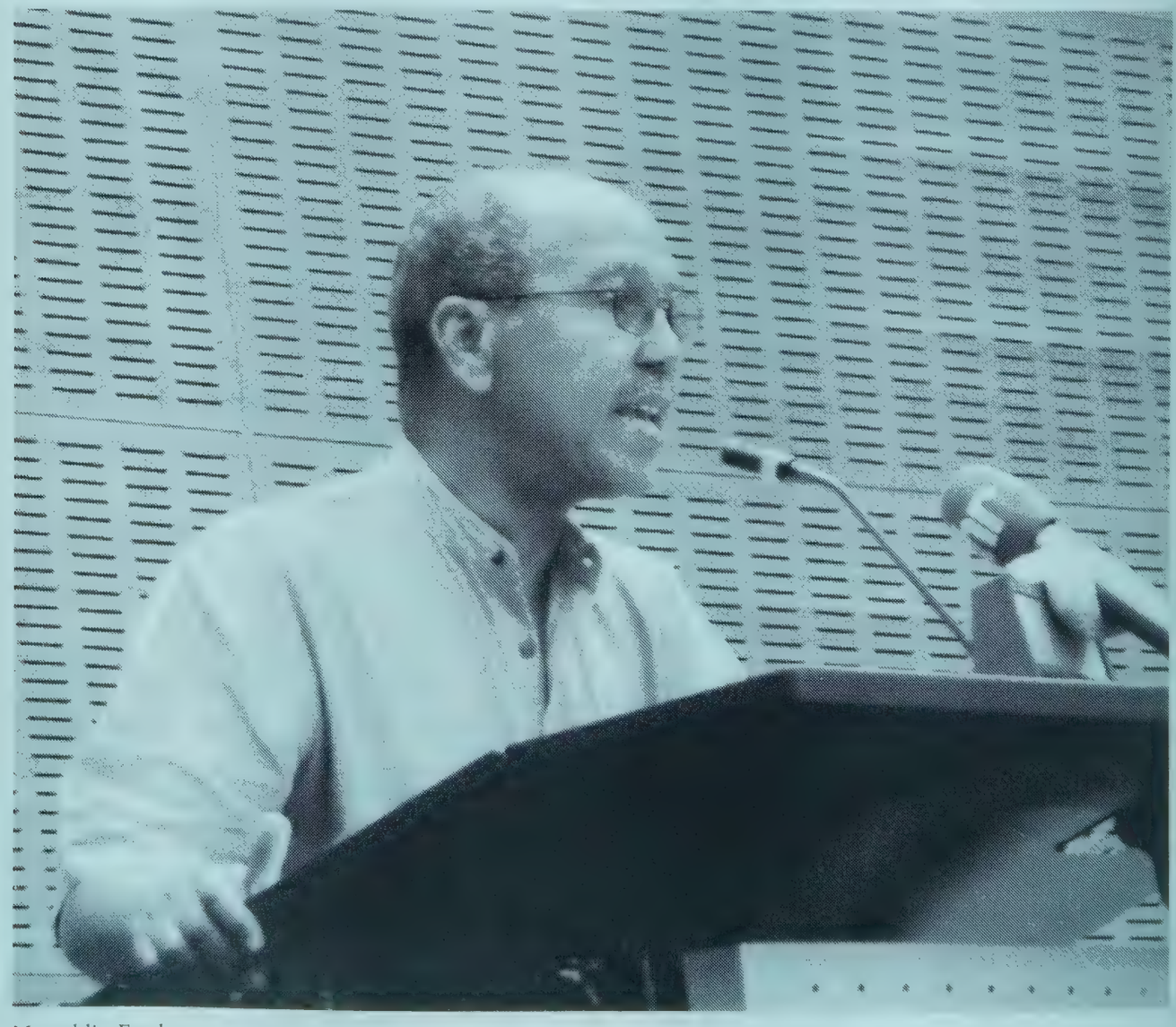
We know that wherever there are guns there will be dire consequences of war, and there is famine. And where there is no democracy, and where state tyranny is as commonplace as malaria is in the tropics, people will feel alienated from themselves. Being alienated and disenfranchised, we sense a false empowerment: that we have more guns than they, and so we attack one another, razing our villages to the ground, with third parties selling more firearms to all the sides. And those that have no guns stay on their haunches forever waiting to be attacked, or expecting help from someone else. Meanwhile, the developed world will dispatch its aid workers and its gunrunners, and before long we're back where we began, with the vicious cycle recurring, and no peace and no democracy on the horizon.

I can think of a country, Ethiopia, which has never known peace and has never experienced democracy, and where famines, wars and centuries-old underdevelopment have worked hand in hand for as long as anyone can recall. Every decade or so, there is either a war feeding on the country, famine, for which the world stage manages an epic performance in a stadium, say, in London or New York, or a state-generated tyranny in which several thousand students are detained. But does anyone care, including the so-called donor countries? Not about peace, nor about democracy, nor about the Ethiopian victims.

No wonder the Ethiopian ruling oligarchy go through life with the expectation that even if they interfere in the political affairs of one countries neighbouring to it by invading it, and then create further havoc by attacking yet a third country, with the result that the wars produce heavy casualty figures close to two millions dead, three million displaced, Ethiopia feels entitled to receiving food aid for its starving millions. I've seen enough African heads of state do what they consider their foot fancywork, blaming the weather, the World Bank and the IM without ever explaining –as in the case of Ethiopia- why they need

a standing army close to a million, and why their arms-purchasing bills come to billions of dollars. You can be sure the Ethiopian Prime Minister, whose creative duplicity knows no bounds, won't admit to being even partly responsible for the upheaval of a region with the population of a hundred million inhabitants, where famines, wars and underdevelopments are the triplets that hold us back.

That Africa has survived is testament to her resilience, especially when you consider what has become of the Australian and the North American native populations whose numbers dwindled through continuous massacres over centuries. But if we want our peoples to be equal partners of the developed, then the world must confront wars, famines and anti-democratic tyrannies with equal venom, discourage gunrunning, and disband the amateur voyeurs who arrive as tourists after a disaster has struck; and no food-giving charities please. Instead, the world must remove the agricultural subsidies put in place to protect the markets that have remained closed to our goods; and no trade embargoes please. This way, we will be able to the redesign our lives, own their problems and will eventually come up with our solutions, and make our gains.



Nuruddin Farah

*Dr. Ruchama Marton (Director of Physicians for Human Rights, Israel)*

# About Loneliness and Radicalism

## Israel – Palestine: There is no Reasonable Aid without Political Intervention

In the context of rethinking the power of aid we wish to discuss the unique, if limited, place of Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, (PHR-I): An Israeli NGO that is both a human rights organization and an organization of social solidarity, based on professional-medical co-working.

Our basic defining experience is loneliness, both at home and abroad: certainly not a characteristic global feeling. This is not to say that we do not find support from our colleagues abroad, but rather to stress that loneliness is something we choose. Being part of the perpetrator's society, there are not so many other options opened to us.

An Israeli human right NGO can take the stand of an observer: one that documents and reports the violation of human rights. The language of »objective« documentation is one that is received well by current western-legalistic discourse. Furthermore, it gives the documenter credit in the eyes of international agents that will associate it with reliability. Being »objective«, though belonging to the occupying society, is in itself admirable. Reliability will be attributed to the observer also by certain parts of Israeli society – first and foremost the media, which finds it easier to deal with concise statistics than with long complex arguments dealing with processes.

Another option is to deal with what we in the human rights NGOs community call »cases« – assisting the victims of specific violations – trying to solve their individual problems. Here one would need the knowledge of legal language, a working knowledge of the State structures and authorities, and the willingness to negotiate with the perpetrator case by case.

Practical humanitarian aid does not belong to the human rights organization tradition, but rather comes from charity orientation.

PHR-Israel combines case-by-case intervention with an ongoing struggle against the policy lying at the base of these violations, trying to expose the processes involved.

The character of our work is influenced by the nature of doctors' education that includes the specific bond or connection between time and life. Time wasted can mean death. Doctors are also educated to be very practical – which means dealing with the case at hand. Inherent to their vocation is the sense that they are as God – in their own eyes and their community as well. This bears a huge sense of responsibility. However, in PHR there is another quality – lacking in many doctors – Radicalism.

Radicalism, although it is a choice to many in our organization is not the obvious choice for others. Some of the physicians suffice in responding to an individual's hardship: the patient without treatment or access to treatment, the tortured prisoner, the physician blocked on the way to work. By doing so, they are following the practical aspect of medicine. Gradually, many will turn to the wider point of view that tries to challenge the source and processes that are at the origin of the individual's hardship (occupation, medical infrastructure level, resource redistribution).

There is a tension between the individual and the macro level in our work. Some prefer to give the weight to the individual level and not complicate it by radical thought and action. This radicalism, they fear, is pushing us away from the consensus and thus making our influence on that same consensus and its administration scarce. Furthermore, there is a great temptation in aiding the individual, it makes good pictures on TV and enables empathy and a feeling of identification with the good-doers on the part of Israeli society. We believe it is our duty to be careful not to fall into the warm hug of consensus, and while aiding the individual – never neglect the radical thought that inevitably leads to struggling against the causes of suffering and oppression.

In our understanding PHR-Israel is not allowed to be just an observer to the wounds and destruction of the conflicts. As doctors, we must assume responsibility to heal the sick and the wounded. As an Israeli organization we know the Israeli apparatus of the occupation, and we are aware of its results as social and historical process. It is our duty as Human Rights activists to use this knowledge.

Example: In the UN special delegate to the OT report – Bertini's report – one of the demands from the IDF is to make sure that a Palestinian ambulance will not be delayed at a checkpoint for more than 30 minutes. The International Committee of the Red Cross demanded that this should be no more than 15 minutes. We cannot accept either of these demands: a 15-minute-delay at one checkpoint, excessive in itself, becomes a tour of hours as there are several checkpoints on every route and so the way to or from medical care turns into a nightmare or in other words- a medical crime.

This is why we cannot be satisfied with collecting data on births at checkpoints, or on demanding that soldiers be put to trial. We will insist to show the process by which the occupation has reached these depths: In the past the generally accepted norm was one in which a woman in labor would be allowed free passage to the hospital. In 1991, with the Gulf War, the Gestalt of occupation took over Israeli outlooks to such a degree, that when a curfew was imposed women in labor were no longer an exception in the eyes of the soldiers. Deaths as a result of this approach made it necessary to create written regulations obliging soldiers to allow women in labor passage. It is fair to say that once we found such written regulations necessary (i.e., the

mid-90), we had in fact lost the game.

It is not enough to be an observer or strive for »regulation« that will assist in our dealing with violations case by case. In order to achieve real change, the existence of a group that will demonstrate radical political commitment and intervention is vital. This group – so we see PHR Israel – must not only confront the authorities with the violations defined in the legal language of international covenants but must also demand them to have the moral courage to open their policies to social justice and and basic human morals:

*We will give an example*

Dr. Hasssan Barghuti, a lecturer in literature at Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, suffered from cancer in deteriorating situation. A hospital in Jordan sent medicine at the recommendation of his physician at Sheikh Zayyed Hospital in Ramalla. A special courier from the Jordanian hospital came to Allenby Crossing with the medicine, but was not permitted to cross to Ramalla. He left the medicine at the Israeli desk at the crossing. The Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees contacted PHR-Israel and asked us to help release the medicine for this patient. At first, the Israeli civil administration demanded that we arrange for a vehicle to come to the crossing to collect the medicine.

PHR-Israel insisted that there was no point arranging for a vehicle until authorization was received to release the medicine. The civil Administration then asked whether the medicine was intended for one patient or more, whether it was donated or purchased, whether it was in a box or a bottle, what legend it bore, who sent it and so on. The authorities then demanded medical documents proving that this specific medicine was indeed required of Dr. Barghuti, as well as the precise name of the medicine. While we were attempting to collect all these details – though feeling its absurd – the authorities informed us that the people who were to come from Ramalla to collect the medicine from the crossing must go in a Palestinian vehicle. In Jericho, they must board a bus that would take them to Allenby terminal. There was no point in their doing so, however, since authorization had still not been granted for receipt of the medicine. Our contacts with the Medical coordinator for the Civil Administration, Dalia Bessa, were also unsuccessful, since she also demanded medical documents before approving the passage of the bottle – or box. Two days later, we telephoned our colleagues at UPMRC to update them, only to learn that Dr. Barghuti had died. At the same time, a telephone call arrived from the civil administration, asking for yet another medical document in order to issue the permit for the passage of the medicine. We informed them that the coordination was no longer required.

Could it be that the real factor here was not Israel's security, but rather the habit of controlling the life and death of Palestinians?

How does one report such a violation? How do we translate into an understandable language the sense of medical

emergency (»medical time«), and unveil the shackles placed on each stage by the bureaucracy of occupation? Precious seconds for life are translated into hours of words procedures. How do we bring the seconds back to life? How can we act in what is by definition a system of beaurocratic time whereas in medical time we have no time to waste?

In our medical actions – treating the individual in our Mobile Clinics in the West Bank – which one could wrongly view as humanitarian by nature – we insist on a radical method: We refuse – as medical staff – to ask the army for permits to enter the WB, we refuse their armed escort for »our security«. In this, as well in the very action of crossing into forbidden, segregated territory, we demonstrate a protest against closure, curfew and for freedom of movement. The medical aid itself exists as a part of the act of concrete solidarity enabled by it.

Being an Israeli organization we refuse to treat the crisis in the occupied territories as temporary and as devoid of context. Unlike Israelis who begin the historical account of the current situation from where it is convenient to them (i.e., September 2000 and the breakdown of the Camp David talks), – we are familiar with, and therefore acknowledge, the long historical processes of occupation and dispositions that brought it about. For this reason, we cannot regard the humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Territories as an independent sudden natural disaster. This crisis has led the Palestinian community to rely more and more on the charity of foreign aid. Major General Amos Gil'ad, the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Occupied Territories has said more than once that the Israeli policy in the OT is enabled by the fact that Israel allows the international community to supply the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians. The economic burden of doing so is too high, so says he, for Israel to sustain (12 billion shekels per annum). (Haáretz, July 5, 2002)

The financing of the Palestinian civil systems by international agencies to a large extent funds and supports Israeli occupation policy. In the long run it will abolish the Palestinian economic system, and erode its ability to recover. At the same time it removes responsibility from Israel as an occupier. The demand to accompany humanitarian aid by a constant uncompromising demand to withdraw from the Occupied Territories is not less political than giving such aid without this demand.

Such a demand was presented to MSF Italy by us and also to various delegations – UN included – that operate in the Occupied Territories. It was listened to seriously. Loneliness is therefore not complete. But loneliness is both a choice and a state of mind. It is also the strength to recognize one's unique place in the struggle and use it as a tool.

* * *

*Ulrike von Pilar (Director of Médecins sans Frontières, Germany)*

# Focusing on Unconditional Humanity

## Neutrality Guarantees Room for Manoeuvre for Humanitarian Organizations

I claim it is counterproductive to mix up the different forms of humanitarian aid and to have the same demands on each of them with regard to their political positions. We should be more careful and precise when dealing with the various concepts and competences of aid: Humanitarian aid is only one possible approach – the protection of human rights and development aid are others.

The centre piece of humanitarian aid is the help offered to people in acute situations of violent conflict – that is what it is for and that is the responsibility of humanitarian organizations. They will be judged by their ability to alleviate the lot of these people. This is why the history of humanitarian practice is indeed a history of tragic failure – not necessarily a failure of the humanitarian organizations but rather of the international community, which stipulated at the Geneva Convention that human beings have a right to aid, but who frequently was unable or unwilling to guarantee this right and to impose it. There was no help for the victims of genocide in Armenia. International relief was not provided in Auschwitz, in Cambodia, in China during the cultural revolution, in the Vietnam War or the Gulf Wars, in Kosovo and in Afghanistan at the time of the US bombardment.

### The first priority – the most needy

This is the central challenge but it receives far too little attention. The central point is unconditional humanity and the right to aid for survival. This does not come because a person belongs to a particular party but because he or she is a human being. This is expressed in the principle of impartiality: in situations of urgent need there are no good or bad victims. Aid must be offered according to the extent of suffering – first of all to the most needy. Therefore, first and foremost humanitarian work must act independently – only in the interest of the victims, only according to needs. If one mixes these principles, for example, with demands for human rights or for free elections, humanitarian aid will be granted only with political strings. In this case, humanitarian aid would be turned into a political instrument – which it should not be, since it can then justifiably be perceived as outside interference and can lose its humanitarian character and its credibility,

Neutrality, on the other hand, that is, to take no position in a political conflict, is a »tool«, not a value in itself. It guarantees access and acceptance and it pursues no »hidden agenda«.

When one insists that all aid must be political because otherwise the aid becomes an accomplice to existing power, this must then be seen in a more differentiated and clearer way. Medecins sans Frontiers (MSF) has always emphasized that aid never acts nor can take place in a non-political space, that a political analysis of that context and its respective interests (including the interests of aid organizations) is essential. However, MSF generally attempts to stay neutral. We don't have a public position in every conflict and we don't think that every conflict situation calls for a political position. However, first of all we do our best to provide information about the people for whom we work and their reality. Secondly, we do protest publicly whenever there is a massive misuse of humanitarian aid.

But as a humanitarian organization we are not obliged to have a position on all political questions and on all governments.

As catastrophic as the state of human rights was under the Taliban, humanitarian aid was still possible to a certain extend and under difficult conditions.

As MSF we did not directly call for women's rights – others were in a better position to do that. But we were able to document the medical consequences of their incredible restrictions for women and children. Frequently human rights organizations were better able to demand their civil rights than we were – that is their political task and mandate. It is our task to provide practical help for the people on a local level and to insist on humanitarian rights. However, in order to do this we need to reach out with permission of those in power.

Without question there can be no neutrality towards human suffering. But when Thomas Gebauer demands that every aid organization must have a vision of a democratic Iraq, I disagree. As MSF we don't know much about democracy in Iraq, so why should we as an organization have an position on this matter? MSF does call for access for independent humanitarian aid and for the possibility to provide aid. MSF demands protection from violence and the arbitrary use of power for the people. It calls for a system that provides food, water and basic medical care for all. This is the task and the responsibility of a humanitarian organization.

## For the people in the midst of war

A lot has been said and communicated about humanitarian aid but little is happening. There is plenty of speculation but no one knows exactly what the present situation in Iraq is, yet everyone is talking about humanitarism. In recent years humanitarian aid has increasingly become a communication strategy – terrible political crises are described in the terminology of humanitarian aid, as if this were the only answer to these violence and conflicts. This is not the case. People who are threatened by violence need protection from violence first rather than humanitarian aid. This protection can only be offered by political or perhaps military

actors. But those increasingly offer aid rather than protection – aid as fig-leaf and as propaganda to justify »force protection« or to calm local negative attitudes towards the military.

It is often said that humanitarian aid prolongs war. This might be the case sometimes but thorough, differentiated studies are missing.

Humanitarian aid would humanize war and thereby make it more feasible, is another reproach. But that is precisely the task of humanitarian aid – to help people in the midst of war. The alternative would be the total war. For me this is one of the major achievements of civilization: protection and aid for defenceless human beings in the midst of war. Or would we prefer the following scenario: War starts and the humanitarian organizations leave? This is the solution some would prefer – but for me this would be a return to barbarism.

*Translation: Keith Chamberlain*

David Rieff, Sabine Eckart, Christiane Grefe and Ulrike von Pilar

DM-120

*Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel*
*(Director of Brot für die Welt/Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, Germany)*

# Aid between Humanitarian Service and Social Intervention

## Towards a Critical Re-definition of the Political Role and the Ethics of Aid

I shall refrain from making a case against politics and the media. I prefer rather to pose some critical questions to the humanitarian aid organizations ourselves. Questions to us who have committed ourselves to the Code of Conduct, whose central assertion is: »We will take care that we don't become instruments of any government's foreign policy … (we) are organizations which act independently of governments. For this reason we formulate our own procedural and operational strategies. We have no intention to implement government policy … nor will we allow ourselves to become agents of the foreign policy of donor governments«.
This commitment involves humanitarian aid with no exclusions – it responds only to the degree of poverty and need. Humanitarian aid must consciously be protected from being misused to political or partisan ends. Now this noble principle stands in direct opposition to the provocative title of this discussion: »Aid – a hostage of foreign and security policies?« and raises a number of questions.
But first it must be observed generally: one becomes a hostage and an instrument of political power when one feels and acts like a dependent, powerless prisoner who must submit oneself to the political game and its rules; when one doesn't know what political game is being played, what one's role is and how effective one can or cannot be; that is when one remains ignorant and passive and only reacts rather than being knowledgeable and pro-active.

### 1)

From recent developments since the Balkan Wars we have learned from our western governments and the mass media that in such conflicts in which massive interests are involved and political-military interventions are planned, that the ethical-humanitarian argument is more and more used as a political-ethical justification and that humanitarian aid is increasingly integrated into and subjected to the political war and post-war strategies – so to speak as publicly effective sub-components to ease the painful effects of war. Exaggerating a little, Jens Jessen, writing in »Die Zeit«, recently compared this to the division of labour between a surgeon and an assisting nurse. The former cuts and removes the malignant cancer while the nurse cares that the wound doesn't bleed too profusely.
The present situation gives rise to the claim that humanitarian aid organiza-

tions are increasingly in danger of becoming efficient humanitarian »service agents«, who not only must submit themselves to the logic of war but are also »embedded« into concrete military planning. Humanitarian aid in the entourage of the occupying power is charged with »winning the hearts and minds of the people«. Recently Colin Powell, with unusual candour, called the humanitarian organizations »power multipliers and an important part of our combat forces«. Accordingly guidelines are being prepared to determine who can provide help to whom in accordance with political and military strategy goals.

This sort of cooperation is not the result of argumentative persuasion on the part of governments. It takes shape above all through competition and access to public resources, favourable or unfavourable signals by the mass media and the immense money raising capacity that they provide. The economic logic of humanitarian aid favours an involuntary politicisation. The increasing number of humanitarian organisations who are basically dependent on government support play a central role in these dynamics. In addition, there is an entire range of protection and cooperation offers from the military and governments which enhance the motivation to let oneself be instrumentalised.

Mind you, this is not a moral claim against politics but rather an attempt to describe the real conditions and our weaknesses. Consequently, we have to ask the following questions to ourselves:

- Are we condemned to being »integrated« and dependent? Are we willing to and able to afford to turn down money offered by governments when it is tied to conditions – as recently done in the case of Iraq by members of our own global church network for humanitarian aid ACT (Action by Churches Together) from belligerent countries? Or done by the Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe in the case of Serbia?
- And in any case of doubt, do we put first our own economic interests and market pressure or the principle of humanitarian aid to which we have committed ourselves in the Code of Conduct?
- At what percentage of back-donor-money (government money) in our budgets has the critical limit of our ability been reached to resist a political instrumentalisation?
- Are we in a position to set up counter balances and counter strategies which give us more flexibility not only in Germany but also in the international context?

## 2)

Our humanitarian credo »not to understand humanitarian aid as a partisan or political act« has not protected us from the fact that in many violent conflicts and wars the humanitarian aid of civilian aid organisations produced clear political effects and emanated political signals. Many of us will remember the accusations from political and media circles that local warlords and despots were maintained and alimented with

humanitarian aid, thus extending senseless wars. Out of the USA emerged the concept »Do no harm« as a guideline for humanitarian organisations to contribute to peaceful solutions through specific and deliberate aid.

Since the Kosovo War and at the latest following the 11th of September we now see in a political roller coaster how western, and especially US policy regards these local conflicts as a global challenge and how a military intervention is perceived as an ethical solution. And the people affected see how humanitarian organisations withdraw their personnel and services in the face of a pending military intervention only to return in the wake of that successful intervention – under the protection of the victorious military forces or even as part of them. Intentionally or unintentionally, humanitarian organisations in these cases also set clear political signals and produced consequences in spite of »Do no harm«, which proves to be obviously inadequate.

Since then we have even seen how humanitarian aid activists themselves called for »humanitarian interventions«. Starting in the beginning as a concept to contain war, humanitarian aid became a legitimisation for war through the emphasis in the so-called »humanitarian imperative«. »Humanitarianism« with the public support of so-called humanitarian organisations became a propagandistic argument for military actions whose real reasons, as we know, were quite different; and barely had the wars begun, and even more after they ended, nobody showed any longer interest in the humanitarian situation of the people – see the Balkan and Afghanistan).

This also raised several questions:

- If it has become clear to us that the action or inaction of aid organisations have political consequences for local conflict parties, the affected populations and international policy, how do we see to it that our activities really »do no harm« (not only in the trivial sense of limiting local conflicts)?
- Should we ignore all of this and, as David Rieff recommended this morning, simply limit ourselves to our »core competence«, deliver the aid and leave the politics to those responsible? I think that the Code of Conduct would not allow this and that impartiality has its price.
- Should we deny this, or at least not mention it, because it is not good for fund-raising? People seems to prefer to give money for uncomplicated humanitarian aid precisely for this reason rather than for long-term development aid, because emergency aid seems to be less complicated as organisations like ourselves (Brot für die Welt and others) have repeatedly called to attention the unjust economic structural conditions which make the success of our help questionable? I think we have to speak about these issues to uncover their abuse. Only that is a useful prerequisite for combating this abuse and for the defence of the good and urgently needed principles of humanitarian aid.

Working in this enlightening way, we cannot simply name the political consequences without assessing their value. But on the basis of which ethical principles shall we do this?

3)

This leads to the last point: I think that it is time to account for our ethical principles as a humanitarian aid organisation, or more generally: to speak about the ethical principles of humanitarian aid. Who are we, the various humanitarian aid organisations and what are our spiritual-intellectual roots? Which religious or political convictions or economic considerations influence the humanitarian evaluation and actions or condition them? What vision and overall strategy play a role in our work, consciously or unconsciously? This has consequences for its quality, too. The Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (responsible for emergency aid) – as a church aid organisation, definitely not an zeitgeist-organisation and considered by some to be outdated and dismissed like some parts of Europe by George Bush – has never made a secret of the fact that our recognition of the need for non-partisan and neutral aid fits into a comprehensive ethical concept. This concept is not characterized by neutrality but rather by partisan action in favour of the poorest, peace, religious and ethnic understanding, reconciliation, social justice, human rights and human dignity, participation and empowerment and, last but not least, by Christian compassion. All this is part of our evaluation of situations and strategy of aid, as well as our public relations. Being a Christian humanitarian aid organisation which is under the same roof and under the same administration as the development organisation Brot für die Welt and Diakonie Menschenrechtsarbeit and cooperating closely with both, it is probably easier for Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe to relate humanitarian aid with other ethical principles such as, for example, a clear peace and reconciliation commitment without much pondering. (This can also offer some protection from the influence and pressure of a utilitarian and capricious ethic in politics)
As part of a large organisation it is easier for us to make use of the various and specific instruments of long-term development and peace work, lobbying and humanitarian aid through the sharpness which results from this separation, without, therefore, turning blind to the greater challenges and visions, as well as for potential conflicts of objectives without feeling politically powerless. We don't have to realize human rights, peace and development work with our humanitarian aid. But we do have the demands of protection of human rights, as well as peace and development policies in mind when we plan our humanitarian aid strategies. Thus our strategies gain a specific quality which we consider to be indispensable. Humanitarian aid is implemented under the perspectives of sustainability, human rights and human dignity and the promotion of peace. This doesn't impinge upon its neutrality but is part and parcel of its Christian-ethical orientation.

*Translation: Keith Chamberlain*

*Humanitarianism in a state of crisis:*

# Rethinking the Power of Aid

## A Conference on the Future of Humanitarian Aid

*March 28–29, 2003*
*University Frankfurt/Main*

*Friday, March 28, 2003, 6 pm-10 pm*

**Opening**

**Humanitarianism in a state of crisis**

- **Welcoming address**

Katja Maurer (medico international)
Ingrid Spiller (Heinrich Böll Foundation, Berlin)
Prof. Micha Brumlik (University of Frankfurt)

- **The humanitarian paradox**

Aid in times of war and poverty
Thomas Gebauer (Executive Director of medico international, Frankfurt)

- **A win-win situation?**

Who is helping whom after all?
Nuruddin Farah (Writer, Cape town/Somalia)

- **The case of Israel/Palestine**

International Aid and local Human Rights NGO
Physicians for Human Rights – Israel
Dr. Ruchama Marton (President of Physicians for Human Rights, Tel Aviv, Israel)

- **Discussion**

Aid in times of war
with the participating guest speakers

*Saturday, March 29, 2003, 9 am – 9 pm*

## The reality of aid

- **Welcoming address**

Katja Maurer (medico international)

- **A bed for the night. Humanitarianism in crisis**

David Rieff (Reporter and Writer, USA)

Panel discussion

- **Aid between technical pragmatism and political action**

Sabine Eckart (Project Coordinator, medico international)
Dr. Ulrike von Pilar (Managing Director of Médecins sans Frontières)
David Rieff (Reporter and Writer, USA)
Dr. Martin Salm (Director of Caritas international),
Facilitator: Christiane Grefe (Editor, Die Zeit)

Panel discussion

- **Aid – hostage to foreign and security policy?**

Prof. Lothar Brock (University of Frankfurt)
Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel (Director of Bread for the World/ Diakonie)
Horand Knaup (Editor, Der Spiegel)
Claudia Roth (Representative for human rights and humanitarian aid, Federal Foreign Office)

Facilitator: Brigitte Kols (Frankfurter Rundschau)

Satire

- **Brief interlude**

with Matthias Deutschmann

## Prospects of aid

*3 parallel forums*

Forum 1

- **Is there a legal right to aid?**

*Keynote:* History of humanitarian aid: ethics and interests: Prof. Micha Brumlik (University of Frankfurt)
*Input:* Right to aid? International law, right and moral: Prof. Dirk Fabricius (University of Frankfurt)
*Practice:* Human right to aid in theory and practice. Dr. Ruchama Marton (President of Physicians for Human Rights, Tel Aviv, Israel)

Forum 2

- **Aid as social responsibility**

*Keynote:* Social security needs to be institutionalised in society: scopes in the national and global processes of designing policies: Jürgen Stetten (Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Berlin)
*Input:* Participative democracy, decentralization, secondary liability – the principles of sustainable societies are also valid in the area of social security: Barbara Unmüssig (Board Member of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Berlin)
*Input:* Techniques of aid: Dr. Thomas Seibert (medico international)
*Practice:* Local and regional models of social welfare: Walter Schütz (medico international, Nicaragua)

Forum 3

- **Can aid be financed?**

*Keynote:* Financing the 'better world': Which ressources exist? Jens Martens (Board Member World Economy, Ecology and Development ( WEED)
*Input:* The role of ecomomy. Public Privat Partnership: Albrecht Graf von Hardenberg (GTZ, Director of the Public-Private Parnership Programme)
Who wins in win-win-games? Critical reflections on public-private interactions: Dr. Andreas Wulf (medico international, Health Action International HAI)

Concluding discussion and future prospects

- **Aid as a challenge to the status quo**

Prof. Micha Brumlik (University of Frankfurt)
Nuruddin Farah (Author, Capetown/ Somalia)
Thomas Gebauer (medico international)
Jens Martens (Board Member of WEED)
Dr. Ruchama Marton (President of Physicians for Human Rights,
Tel Aviv, Israel)
David Rieff (Writer and Journalist, USA)
Barbara Unmüssig (Board Member of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Berlin)

Facilitator: Christiane Knauf (Hessischer Rundfunk)

- **Closing**

Katja Maurer (medico international)

# Rethinking the Power of Aid

Aid can never be an ally of war and violence. Helping each other requires empathy and enables us to overcome poverty and dependency.

This idea of aid is subject to enormous pressure these days. Eradicating the root causes of poverty and promoting social development used to be major aims of aid, but today nothing more seems to be left but mere pragmatic action obeying technical and economic criteria rather than social maxims. Donor interests are pushing their way to the focus of attention or, what is worse, the act of providing aid increasingly depends on the extent to which it can be exploited by the media. Aid is bound to become a commodity which is no longer directly linked to those in need, serving as an instrument to mitigate the effects of unsuccessful policies instead. Aid – hostage to global security policy and prevailing informal power structures? It is high time, particularly for aid organizations, to scrutinize their own practices and the ongoing structural change of aid.

The conference »Rethinking the power of aid« hosted by medico international and the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation intended to raise awareness for these issues. A critical analysis was being followed by the question for potential maxims for aid in times of globalisation. Because a different kind of help is possible – and necessary.

medico international